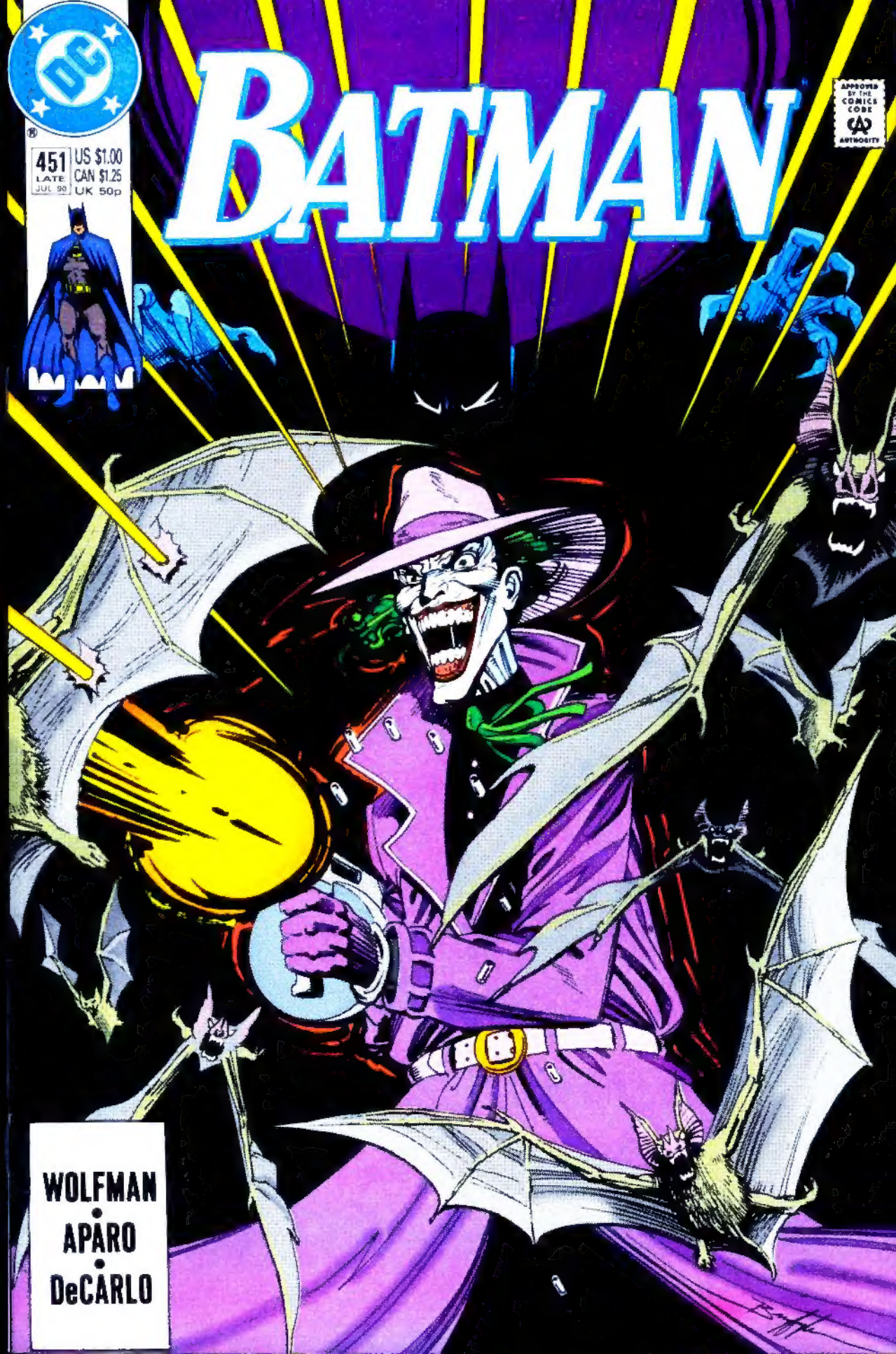
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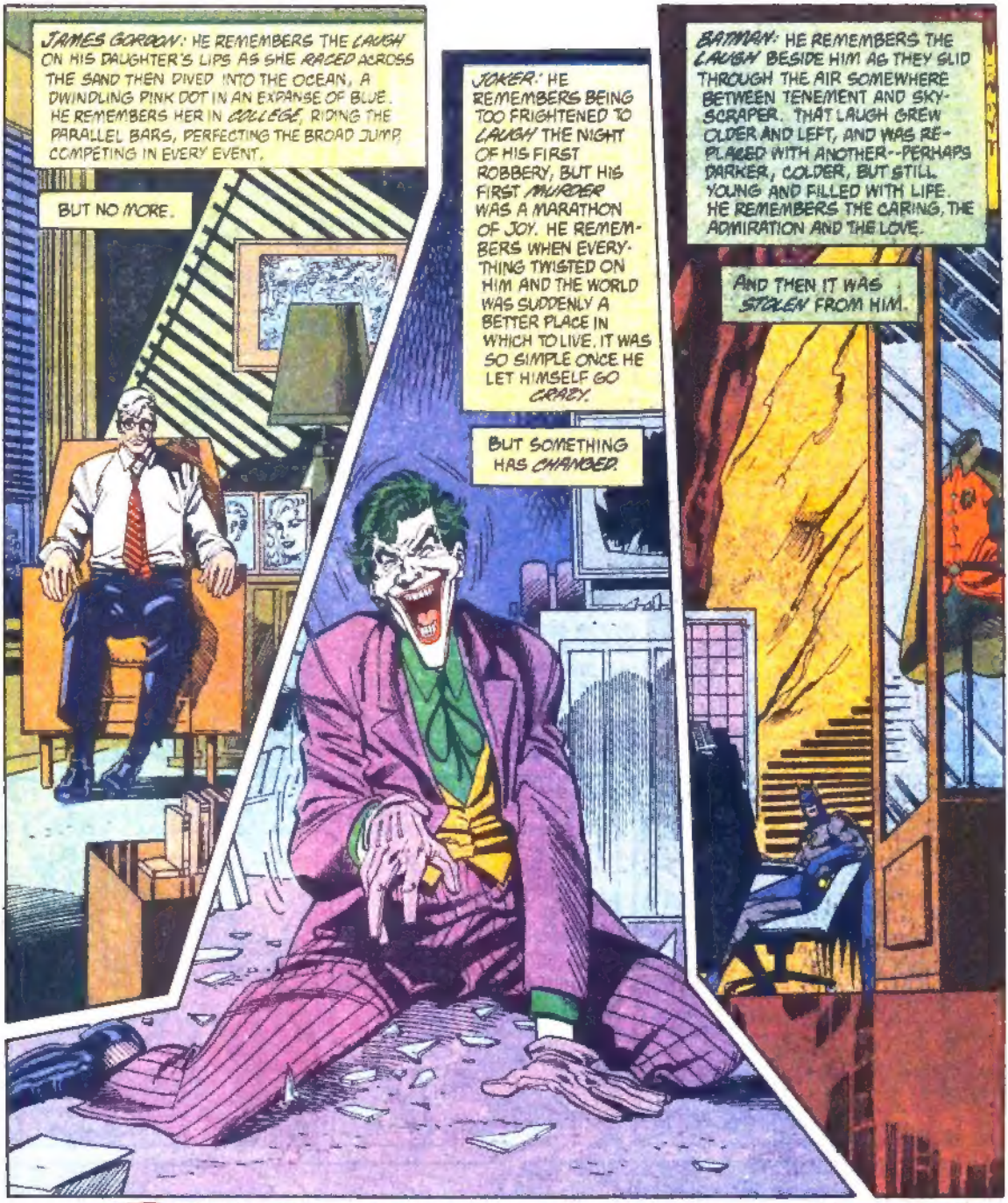
JAMES GORDON: HE REMEMBERS THE LAUGH ON HIS DAUGHTER'S LIPS AS SHE RACED ACROSS THE SAND THEN DIVED INTO THE OCEAN, A DWINDLING PINK DOT IN AN EXPANSE OF BLUE. HE REMEMBERS HER IN COLLEGE, RIDING THE PARALLEL BARS, PERFECTING THE BROAD JUMP, COMPETING IN EVERY EVENT.
BUT NO MORE.
JOKER: HE REMEMBERS BEING TOO FRIGHTENED TO LAUGH THE NIGHT OF HIS FIRST ROBBERY, BUT HIS FIRST MURDER WAS A MARATHON OF JOY. HE REMEMBERS WHEN EVERYTHING TWISTED ON HIM AND THE WORLD WAS SUDDENLY A BETTER PLACE IN WHICH TO LIVE. IT WAS SO SIMPLE ONCE HE LET HIMSELF GO CRAZY.
BUT SOMETHING HAS CHANGED.
BATMAN: HE REMEMBERS THE LAUGH BESIDE HIM AS THEY SLID THROUGH THE AIR SOMEWHERE BETWEEN TENEMENT AND SKYSCRAPER. THAT LAUGH GREW OLDER AND LEFT, AND WAS REPLACED WITH ANOTHER--PERHAPS DARKER, COLDER, BUT STILL YOUNG AND FILLED WITH LIFE. HE REMEMBERS THE CARING, THE ADMIRATION AND THE LOVE.
AND THEN IT WAS STOLEN FROM HIM.

JUDGEMENTS!

MARV WOLFMAN writer • JIM APARO penciller • MIKE DECARLO inker • JOHN COSTANZA letterer • ADRIENNE ROY colorist • DAN RASPLER assoc. ed. • DENNY O'NEIL editor

Batman created by BOB KANE

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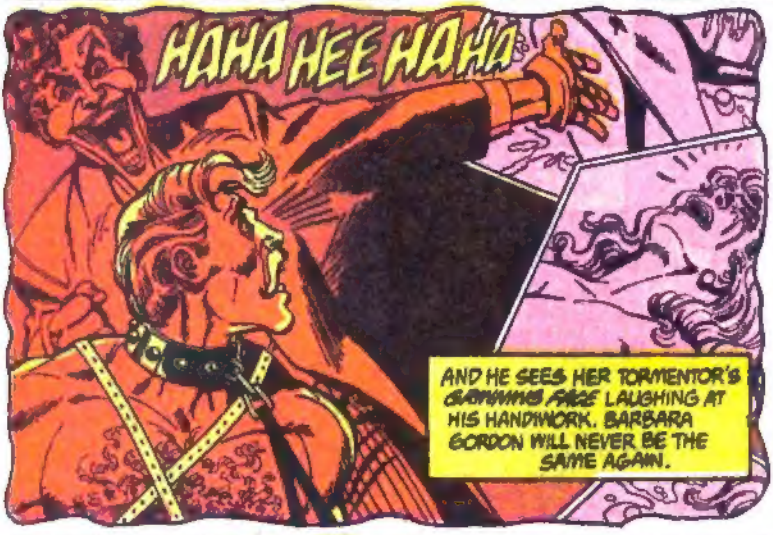
THE GOOD MEMORIES CLOUD OVER. HE SEES HER TWISTED BODY, BROKEN BONES, LIFELESS LEGS.

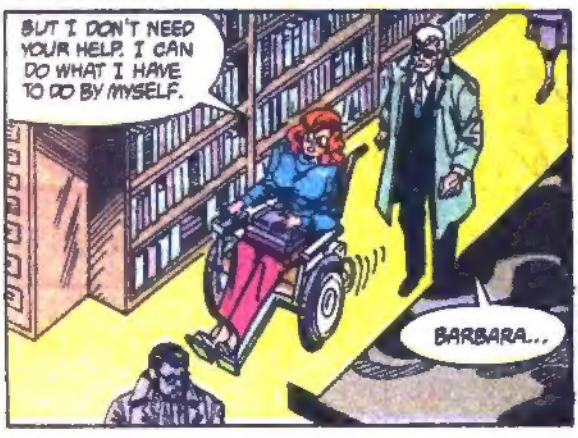

HAHA HEE HA HA
AND HE SEES HER TORMENTOR'S GLOATING FACE LAUGHING AT HIS HANDIWORK. BARBARA GORDON WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN.

AND THERE'S NOT ONE THING IN HELL HE CAN DO ABOUT IT.
PUBLIC LIB
YOU'RE CERTAIN YOU'RE ALL RIGHT, HON?

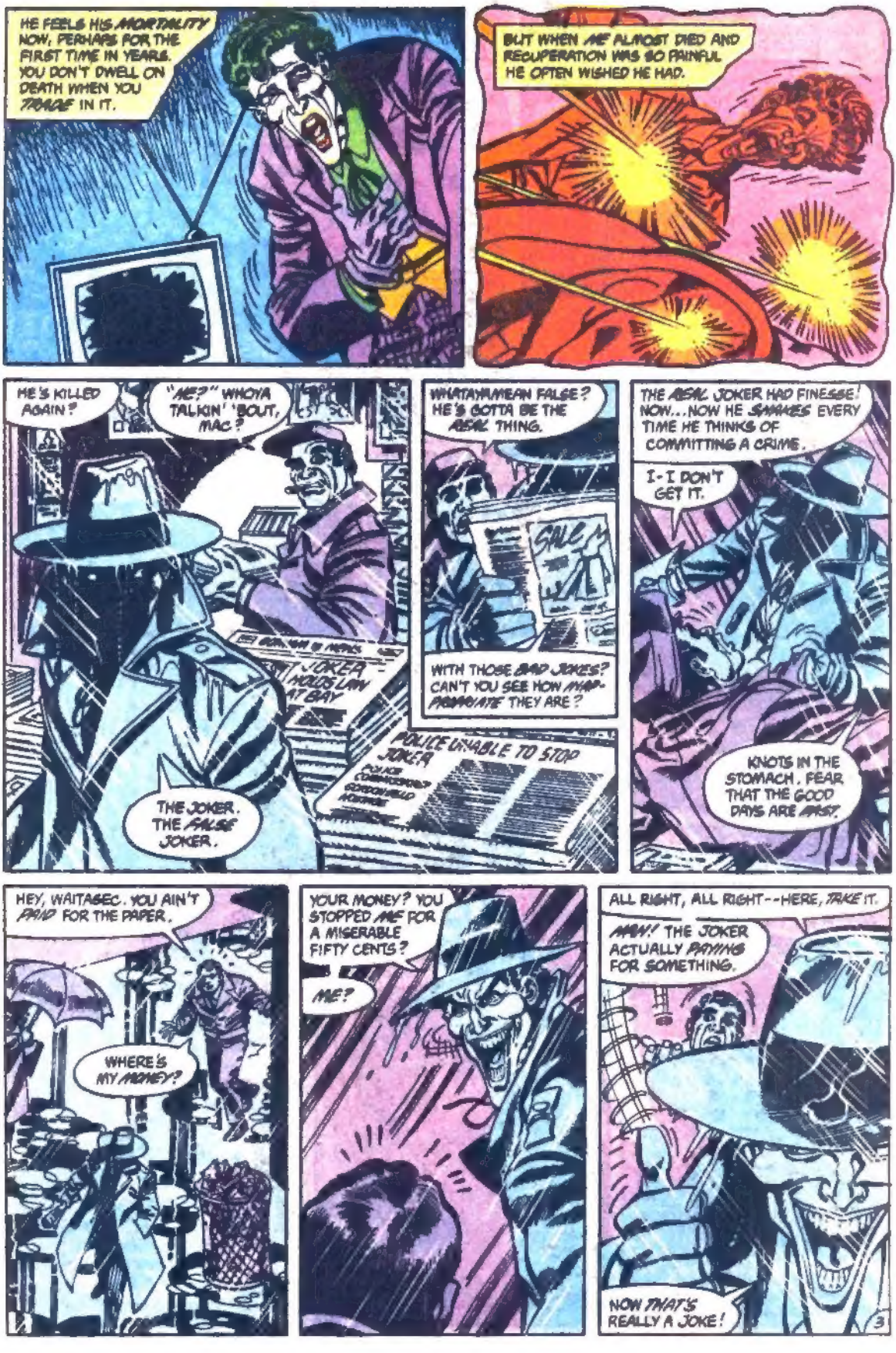
THERE ARE MORE HOSPITALS. MORE TESTS.

DAD, I'M FINE. LAY OFF. MAYBE I AM CRIPPLED, OR HANDICAPPED, OR PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED...
OR WHAT-EVER YOU WANT TO CALL IT--

--BUT I'M NOT DEAD. I CAN DO THINGS BY MYSELF. I'M JUST AS GOOD AS EVER.
BUT YOU'RE NOT. I MEAN, IT'S NOT THE SAME. GOD, BARBARA, I WANT TO HELP.


BUT I DON'T NEED YOUR HELP. I CAN DO WHAT I HAVE TO DO BY MYSELF.
BARBARA...

...HE'S ALIVE.
AND I'M SCARED OF WHAT I MAY DO WHEN I FIND HIM.
2


HE FEELS HIS MORTALITY NOW, PERHAPS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS. YOU DON'T DWELL ON DEATH WHEN YOU THRIVE IN IT.
BUT WHEN ME ALMOST DIED AND RECUPERATION WAS SO PAINFUL HE OFTEN WISHED HE HAD.
HE'S KILLED AGAIN?
"ME?" WHOYA TALKIN' 'BOUT, MAC?
JOKER HOLDS LAW AT BAY
POLICE UNABLE TO STOP JOKER
THE JOKER. THE FALSE JOKER.
WHATAYAMEAN FALSE? HE'S GOTTA BE THE REAL THING.
SALE
WITH THOSE BAD JOKES? CAN'T YOU SEE HOW INAP-PROPRIATE THEY ARE?
THE REAL JOKER HAD FINESSE! NOW...NOW HE SHAMES EVERY TIME HE THINKS OF COMMITTING A CRIME.
I-I DON'T GET IT.
KNOTS IN THE STOMACH. FEAR THAT THE GOOD DAYS ARE PAST.
HEY, WAITASEC. YOU AIN'T PAID FOR THE PAPER.
WHERE'S MY MONEY?
YOUR MONEY? YOU STOPPED ME FOR A MISERABLE FIFTY CENTS?
ME?
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT--HERE, TAKE IT.
MAN! THE JOKER ACTUALLY PAYING FOR SOMETHING.
NOW THAT'S REALLY A JOKE!
3

THE CAVE CLOSES IN ON HIM, THE COLD EMBRACES HIM.
BATMAN UNMASKS TO STOP
POLICE
JOKER
FOR ONCE HE CURSES HIS PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY.
HOT CHOCOLATE, SIR? DO YOU NEED TO RELAX OR TO PUNCH SOMEONE IN THE FACE?
ALFRED, DO YOU EVER THINK I'M CRAZY DOING WHAT I DO?
I ASSUME YOU ARE NOT SERIOUS IN DESIRING AN ANSWER.
IF YOU ARE, I'D PREFER MY QUESTIONS TO BE OF THE MULTIPLE CHOICE VARIETY.
HE'S OUT THERE, JASON'S KILLER.
AND WHEN I SEE HIM IN MY HEAD AND WINCE WHEN I HEAR JASON SCREAM--
-- I WONDER WHY I DON'T SIMPLY GET A GUN AND SHOVE IT IN JOKER'S MOUTH...
I'M SCARED, ALFRED. SCARED ONE DAY I MAY.
YOU WON'T, SIR. YOU CAN'T.
FEAR NOT. WHATEVER ELSE YOU MAY BE, YOU ARE NOT A KILLER.
4

HOW DOES ONE WHITE-CHALK FACE BECOME SO FEARED HE MAKES CRIME SO... EASY?
THE ONLY THOUGHTS ABOUT CURTIS BASE ARE OF SOME YUPPIE WALL-STREET WIZARD.
BUT PUT ON THIS MASK AND EVERYONE GROVELS IN TERROR.
TO BECOME THE JOKER I'VE LEARNED EVERYTHING ABOUT HIM. WHO HE WAS. HOW HE CAME TO BE.
JUNK BONDS GO. DOW JONES AVERAGES FALL. THE STOCK EXCHANGE MAY GO TO HELL--
--BUT CRIME MARCHES ON.
C-CURTIS, DON'T YOU THINK WE MAY BE PUSHING THIS TOO FAR. I MEAN, THIS ROBBERY TONIGHT--
YOU HAVE AN OPINION, MY LITTLE FRIEND?
BOBBY, COME HERE. SHARE IT WITH ME.
YOU'RE A SQUIRRELLY LITTLE MAGGOT I PICKED UP HALF-DRUNK ON THE BOWERY.
I SHOWED YOU A WAY THAT COULD LEAD TO MAKING US ALL MILLIONS.
YOU DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO AN OPINION.
YOU KNOW, BECOMING THE JOKER DOES HAVE ITS ADVANTAGES.
I COULD LEARN TO LIKE THIS...A LOT.
C-CURTIS... JOKER... I'M ON YOUR SIDE... I'M REALLY ON YOUR SIDE.
5

I GOTTA GET OUT. THE MAN'S FLIPPING OUT... I THINK HE THINKS HE REALLY IS THE JOKER.
BAR
BOBBY, YOU TRY 'N GET OUT, YOU'RE DEAD MEAT.
AND IF WE DON'T, HE'S STILL GONNA TAKE US BOTH DOWN WHEN HE'S DONE. YOU KNOW THAT, MAN.
OKAY, OKAY-- WE GO ALONG TONIGHT.
BUT TOMORROW, AFTER THE SPLIT, I'M GETTIN' OUTTA THIS BURG...
...WHILE I STILL CAN WALK.
TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT THIS PHOTOGRAPH...
...THE JOKER'S HENCHMEN. I WANT THEIR NAMES.
GATEWAY RAC
"I WANT TO KNOW EVERY-THING ABOUT THEM."
6

WE ALL KNOW WHO THESE MEN ARE.
WE ALL KNOW THEY FREQUENT THIS AREA, PROBABLY THIS... UMM, ESTABLISHMENT.
BAR
CONSIDERING THEY ARE PROBABLY DRIFTERS, IT WOULD TAKE DAYS TO TRACK THEM DOWN...
...SO YOU'LL SAVE MY TIME AND SIMPLY TELL ME WHERE THEY LIVE...
WON'T YOU?
SURE, SURE... I KNOW ONE OF 'EM. BOBBY K. LIVES A DOZEN'R SO BLOCKS FROM HERE... AT MA RUMEY'S PLACE.
WHAT'S HE DONE? WHO'D HE KILL?
7

MMFFMFMF
FMM
YOU KNOW, I ENTER THIS THIRD-RATE DIVE LOOKING FOR SECOND-RATE HOODS--
--AND IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS WHEN I ASK A QUESTION, I REALLY WANT AN ANSWER...
...NOT SMART-ALEC SUGGESTIONS THAT WOULD REQUIRE A DOUBLE-JOINTED CONTORTIONIST.
SO, DO YOU HAVE SUGGESTIONS, TOO? OR ANSWERS?
OKAY... OKAY. THE GUY YOU WANT'S NAMED BOBBY K.--
SLEEPS AT MA RUMEY'S BOARDING HOUSE.
IT'S GOOD TO KNOW OUR SCHOOLS ARE TEACHING SMARTS THESE DAYS.
YOU'RE A FASCINATING CONVERSATIONALIST, MY FRIEND.
NO HARD FEELINGS, OKAY?
N-NO--IT'S GONNA EXPLODE. YOU'RE GONNA KILL ME!
I--I STILL HAVE IT. THEY LOOK AT ME AND THEY'RE SCARED STIFF.
NOW I JUST HAVE TO BELIEVE IT MYSELF AGAIN. I HAVE TO BELIEVE.
ORDINARY CIGAR.
BAR
NEVER GIVE 'EM WHAT THEY EXPECT.
8

no good i can't take it gotta get outta here tonight
die if i stay any longer
COME ON IN, BOBBY. WE'VE GOT LOTS TO TALK ABOUT.
I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.
hell with curtis--let Batman take 'im down.
get outta town it'll be too late never find me
HI. OR SHOULD I SAY, "BON VOYAGE"?
9

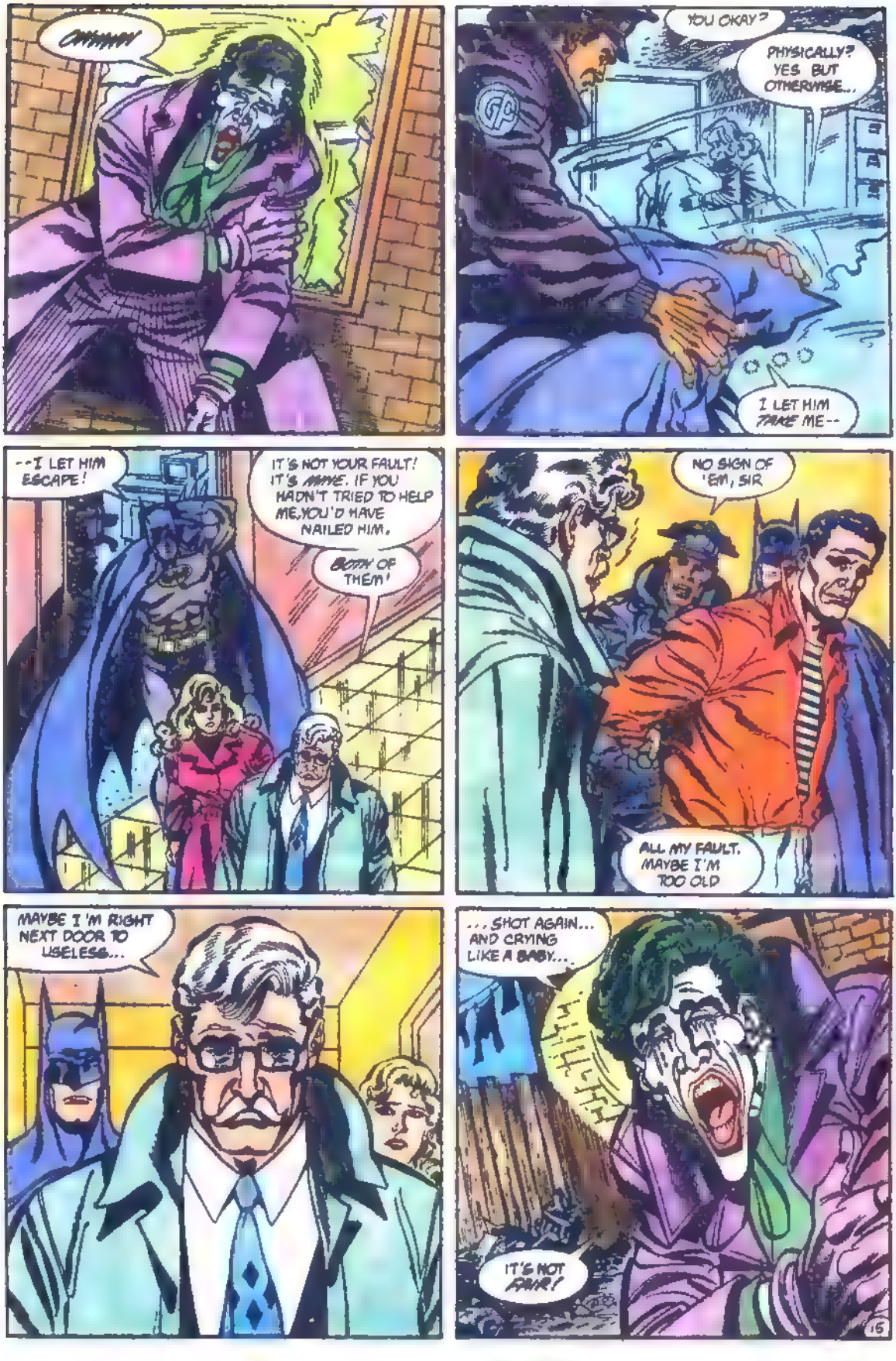
C-CURTIS? WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
BOBBY, YOU WOULDN'T BE RUNNING AWAY NOW, WOULD YOU?
NO, I SWEAR I WASN'T. AFTER THE GIG TONIGHT...
...WITH MY SHARE... I WAS MOVIN' INTO A BIGGER APARTMENT. THAT'S ALL. YEAH.
"GAS," BOBBY? INDULGE ME, FRIEND. WHAT MEANS WE ROBBING AGAIN TONIGHT?
THE AIRLINE BUILDING... THE TICKET OFFICE. MIDNIGHT.
I-I WAS JUST MOVIN' MY STUFF. THEN I SWEAR I WAS GONNA MEET YOU THERE.
CHANGE OF PLANS, BOBMEISTER. NO EVIL-DOING TONIGHT.
CURTIS, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? I'M ON YOUR SIDE. I'D NEVER GO AGAINST YOU.
CURTIS? WHOEVER SAID I WAS CURTIS?
YOU LOOK ALLUSHED. DON'T STRUGGLE TO HARD, BOBSTER.
YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE WHERE YOU FIND YOURSELF.
C'MON, LEMME OUTTA HERE, FOR PITY'S SAKE, LEMME OUT!
HA HA HAH
10

THIS BOBBY CHARACTER SAID BASE IS POSING AS THE JOKER? GREAT! JUST WHAT WE NEED, TWO MANIACS ON THE LOOSE.
HOW'S BARBARA?
PROUD. STUBBORN. REFUSES MY HELP.
SHE'S THE SAME AS SHE WAS BEFORE THE JOKER SHOT--
YOU WANT TO BE IN ON THIS?
KOF KOF. SMOKE TOO MUCH.
I SHOULD GIVE IT UP ONE OF THESE DAYS.
BUT SOME THINGS ARE HARD TO LET GO OF.
EVEN WHEN YOU KNOW IT'S IN YOUR BEST INTEREST.
YOU'RE AFRAID WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF YOU DO LET GO. AND YOU'RE AFRAID IF YOU DON'T.
BUT YOU HAVE TO CONFRONT YOUR FEARS, DON'T YOU?
WHAT ABOUT YOU?
IT'S THE ONLY WAY I KNOW TO LIVE
11

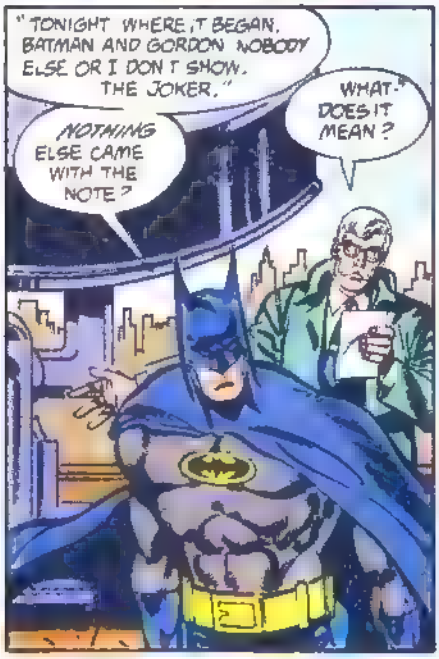
D-DID YOU HAVE TO KILL HIM THAT WAY? IT'S HORRIBLE.
I GUESS HE DIDN'T TAKE TO BE NG NEEDLED, EH?
KLIK KLIK
NEEDLED GET IT, GAG?
YOU KNOW, I COULD REALLY GET OFF ON BE'NG THE JOKER
KLIK-KLIK KLIK
THERE'S A CERTAIN FREEDOM IN LETTING INSANITY RULE.
AHA. PERFECTION LOOK, LOOK! BOGUS AIRLINE TICKETS... WORTH ALMOST THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND.
AND MINE HAVE BEEN COUNTERFEITED ON THE AIRLINE'S OWN PRINTER HOW GOOD CAN YOU GET?
ISN'T THAT RIGHT... JOKER?
I REALLY DID THINK YOU WERE DEAD. OF COURSE, WHEN YOU DIED DOESN'T MATTER MUCH NOW, DOES IT?
"YOU SEE, I'VE GOTTEN USED TO BEING YOU.
LOOK AT YOU-- YOU'RE AFRAID.
YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD MARCH IN HERE AND BECOME THE JOKER AGAIN BUT YOU'RE NOT WORTHY OF BEING HIM
12

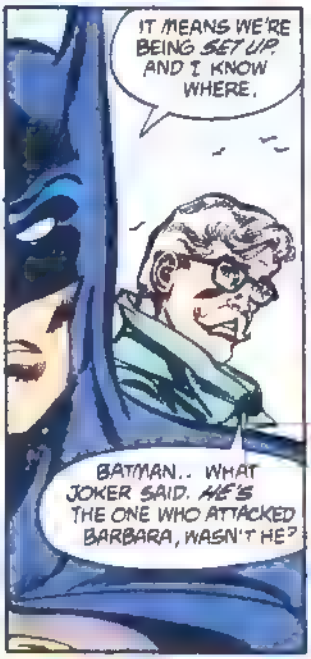
BUT IT S ALL RIGHT THE BETTER JOKER HAS WON
THIS IS WRONG! THIS IS NOT FUNNY!
NO, IT ISN'T
TWO JOKERS FOR THE PRICE OF ONE AND BOTH READY TO BE PUT BACK IN THE DECK
COMM SSIONER?
I COULD END IT HERE AND NOW.. CLOSE THE JOKER OUT FOREVER.
THE WORLD WOULD THANK ME FOR IT
JUST A SQUEEZE OF THE TRIGGER--
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
COMMISSIONER.. YOU'RE IN OUR LINE OF FIRE--
13

THANKS FOR THE DISTRACTION!
TEAR GAS!
OBVIOUSLY, YOU PEOPLE WERE NEVER BOY SCOUTS.
KRASH
I WAS THAT'S WHY I WAS PREPARED!
KHOFF... CAN'T-- BREATHE--
JIM THE DOOR S TO YOUR LEFT GET OUT--! I'LL HANDLE THE JOKER--
NO... HE'LL HANDLE YOU!


OHHHH!
YOU OKAY?
PHYSICALLY? YES. BUT OTHERWISE...
I LET HIM TAKE ME--
--I LET HIM ESCAPE!
IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT! IT'S MINE. IF YOU HADN'T TRIED TO HELP ME, YOU'D HAVE NAILED HIM.
BOTH OF THEM!
NO SIGN OF 'EM, SIR
ALL MY FAULT. MAYBE I'M TOO OLD
MAYBE I'M RIGHT NEXT DOOR TO USELESS...
...SHOT AGAIN... AND CRYING LIKE A BABY...
AHHHHHH
IT'S NOT FAIR!

NOT OVER YET, BATMAN. YOU, GORDON AND THE JOKER.
YOU'LL DO IN EACH OTHER FOR ME.
THEN I WILL BE THE ONLY JOKER FOREVER!
HAHA HA HA HA HA
GOTHAM
TWO JOKERS
ASSAU
GOTHAM
SECOND JOKER
WALL
SLA


"TONIGHT WHERE IT BEGAN, BATMAN AND GORDON NOBODY ELSE OR I DON'T SHOW. THE JOKER."
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
NOTHING ELSE CAME WITH THE NOTE?


IT MEANS WE'RE BEING SET UP. AND I KNOW WHERE.
BATMAN.. WHAT JOKER SAID. HE'S THE ONE WHO ATTACKED BARBARA, WASN'T HE?

IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN BASE COULD IT?
WE'LL FIND OUT, JIM. TRUST ME, WE'LL FIND OUT.

SENT TO ALL NEWS-PAPERS AND MEDIA "TONIGHT. WHERE IT BEGAN THE JOKER."
POLICE REFUSE COMMENT OR EXPLANATION, BUT--

NOOOOOO
I'M NOT READY TO BE THE JOKER AGAIN. NOT READY--
BUT I HAVE TO! I HAVE TO!!

ACE CHEMICAL PROCESSING INC
THIS IS WHERE IT BEGAN?
HE FELL INTO THE CHEMICALS WHILE ESCAPING.
IT BLEACHED HIS SKIN WHITE, HIS HAIR GREEN, HIS LIPS RUBY RED.
SO NOW IT'S JUST THE TWO OF US AND HIM
MY MEN ARE TWO BLOCKS SOUTH.. NOT TO SCARE HIM OFF.
THEY'RE KEEPING REPORTERS OUT OF OUR WAY.
THEY WOULDN'T HAVE SCARED ME EVEN IF THEY WERE LINED UP LIKE TIN SOLDIERS BESIDE YOU.
BUT THEN I'M CERTIFIABLY INSANE, AREN'T I?
WHY DID YOU WANT US TO COME HERE, JOKER?
TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT--ME DIDN'T SEND THAT NOTE.
I DID. TO YOU AND TO THE MEDIA.
SPLANG
TO BRING YOU ALL HERE TOGETHER.
AND THE REASON IS SIMPLE
TO GET RID OF ALL MY OBSTACLES AT ONCE.
17

NO--NO!
JOKER'S PROBLEM HAS ALWAYS BEEN YOU TWO. HE WAS SIMPLY NEVER GOOD ENOUGH TO GET RID OF YOU.
WITH BATMAN GONE, THERE WILL BE NO MIND KEEN ENOUGH TO CHALLENGE ME.
I'M THE JOKER I AM THE JOKER. I AM THE JOKER!
AS FOR GORDON.. I'LL BE ABLE TO BUY THE NEXT COMMISSIONER.
DON'T LET THE ACIDS TOUCH YOU
:KOF KOF: NOTHING'S GOING TO STOP ME
18

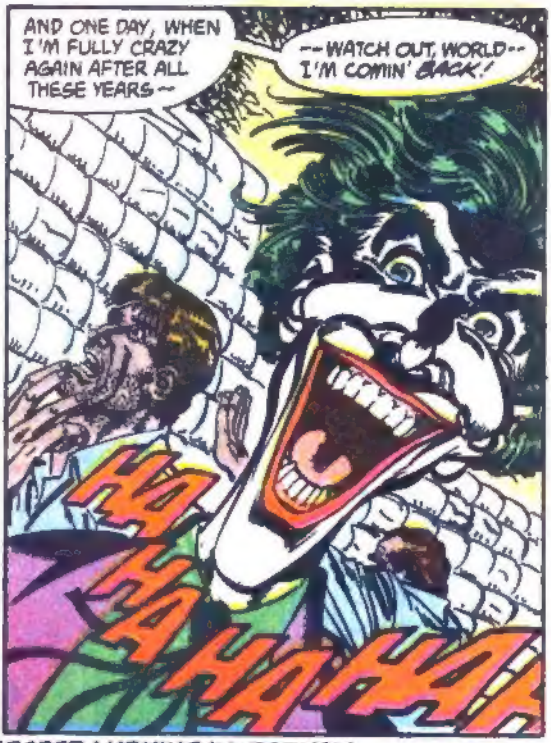
YOU DON'T HAVE TO HELP ME.
THEN STAY BACK.
I WANT TO BE THERE. I HAVE TO BE PART OF IT.
JIM. STAY HERE. PLEASE.
FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, BE CAREFUL. THEY'RE BOTH CRAZY.
BUT I'M NOT.
I PAID A FORTUNE TO LEARN EVERYTHING ABOUT THE JOKER.
THE FILES AT ARKHAM ARE QUITE DETAILED. AND WHAT DID I LEARN?
THAT I WOULD MAKE A BETTER JOKER THAN THE ORIGINAL.
HIS INSANITY PREVENTS HIM FROM BEING A SUCCESS.
BUT MY MIND WILL MAKE ME EXCEL WHERE HE FAILED!
YOU CAN'T SEE IT, CAN YOU?
YOU'RE AS CRAZY AS HE IS!

NO, BATMAN... I'M QUITE SANE, SANE ENOUGH TO KILL YOU ALL.
UH UHH, LOONEY TUNE-- THE JOKE'S ON YOU.
THIS IS A JOKE, TOO, YOU SEE. IRONY MIXED WITH DECEIT. THE STUFF THAT CALUMNS ARE MADE OF.
BUT YOU DON'T GET THE REAL JOKES, DO YOU. ONLY I CAN.
I'M THE REAL JOKER, PAL. ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTES.
YOU'RE MORE PINSTRIPE THAN PINHEAD. BROOKS BROTHERS THAN RUMSLAMS.
I'M JUST AS GOOD AS YOU. I SEE THINGS THE SAME WAY. I KNOW THE JOKE.
I CAN REALLY BE YOU, JOKER. I CAN BECOME BETTER THAN YOU!
I CAN BE THE NEW JOKER!
BABE-- DON'T DO IT!
THESE ARE STRONGER ACIDS TODAY, THEY--

HAHAHAHAHAHA
HEY, EASY ON THE MERCHANDISE. THIS SUIT'S NEW!
YOU DON'T GET THEM OFF THE RACK, YOU KNOW.
HE'S GONE... HE'S JUST GONE.
INDUSTRIAL WASTES DOWN ONE. FILM AT ELEVEN.
MY GOD! IT'S EATING HIM ALIVE!
YAGH
YOU WANTED THE JOKER. DECIDE WHAT YOU WANT US TO DO WITH HIM.
I'D KILL ME IF I WERE ME.
THERE THEY ARE.

GOOD TO BE HOME AMONGST THE LOONY TUNES AND DIMWATT BULBS.
I NEEDED THIS. THE OUTSIDE WORLD WAS GETTING SO DEPRESSING, IT ALMOST MADE ME FORGET THE JOKE.

BUT HERE, WHERE ALL OF US COMBINED ARE SEVERAL PANCAKES SHORT A STACK--
--I CAN FINALLY GET SOME REST AND RELAXATION COMBINED WITH A GOOD OLD-FASHIONED DOSE OF ONE HUNDRED PERCENT AMERICAN INSANITY



NEXT ISSUE: THERE HAS BEEN A TERRIBLE SECRET LURKING IN GOTHAM. IT IS FINALLY REVEALED IN-- DARK NIGHT/DARK CITY

A SPECIAL THREE-PART SERIES THAT BEGINS IN BATMAN #452